THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) Yes, Sir. The Expenditure Reforms Commission (ERC) in its report pertaining to the Ministry of External Affairs has recommended closing down of seven Indian Missions abroad.

(b) The seven Missions recommended by the ERC for closure are in the following countries :

Botswana, Burkina Faso, Jamaica, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles and Peru.

(c) The Ministry of External Affairs, independent of ERC's recommendations regarding closure of these seven Missions, has decided to close down of the Mission namely High Commission of India, Malta and Embassy of India, Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). While the Mission in Malta has been closed down, the Mission in Ouagadougou will be closed down shortly. The expected amount of savings accruing to the Government of India per annum on account of closure of these two Missions is approximately Rs. 1.64 crores. A review of the recommendation of the ERC to close down the other five Missions is under consideration of the Ministry keeping in view the larger political implications of closing a Mission abroad.

American Commission on Gujarat Communal Violence

†204. SHRI MOTILAL VORA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn towards a news-item captioned, "Gujarat Ki Sampradayik Hinsa Par Sunvai Karega Amriki Ayog", published in Rashtriya Sahara dated 7th June, 2002;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) whether Government have registered its protest with the American Government;

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) to (e) Yes, Sir. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom conducted a hearing on 10 June, 2002 on the subject of "Recent Communal Violence in Gujarat, India and response". The Commission is a non-official body mandated by the U.S. Congress. The international community is well aware that Government rejects any intrusive inquiry into the internal affairs of India. India's long tradition of secularism and its constitutional, legal and institutional safeguards for the rights and welfare of all citizens are well known.

Softness towards Pakistan despite Musharraf's support to Kashmir

†205. SHRI MOTILAL VORA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn towards the news-item captioned, "Musharraf ne Kashmeerion ko Samarathan jari rakhne ka bharosa dilaya", published in the Dainik Jagran on 8th June, 2002;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto and the reasons for showing softness towards Pakistan inspite of the said fact; and

(c) whether this softness will not affect the international scenario created against Pakistan ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) It was reported in the press that Pakistani President met Hurriyat leaders from PoK and assured Pakistan's diplomatic and moral support for the "cause of Kashmir".

(b) and (c) Such statements are a part of Pakistan's futile efforts to justify its sponsorship of cross border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and in other

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.